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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Happy Halloween!! The flock of trick o' treaters are swarming all over the neighborhood as I finish off this week's issue. As usual, I'm upstairs in my study watching over my two monsters while my wife is manning the candy. On occasion, I take a look out one of the windows to see what creatures are out and about. Fun stuff!

Well, today marks the official beginning of another round of unemployment; I files for unemployment benefits today - the second time in my lifetime. This comes one day after the owner of the course I work(ed) held the annual staff outing: a golf tournament and a lobster/clambake at his home afterward. It was fun, but really cold for both events!

I know that even before I see Joe's column this week, it's going to be full of reminders of the importance of getting out next Tuesday and vote. Yes, I fully agree with him. While I'm not 100 percent happy with any of the choices, I'm planning to head out and vote. My vote is my statement for what I want the next four years, or not want. Either way, I'm gonna do it. And just think, no more political ads on television and radio! So get out and vote next week; it only takes a few minutes of your precious time!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Not a lot of messages again this week, and I'm afraid that this is the way it's going to be for the foreseeable future. I know, I know. I'm not happy about it either. But as my relatives in New York City say, "'Ay, it is what it is, ya know what I' sayin'"?

But I figured that since I had a forum here, I'd take the opportunity to hammer at you again about voting.

I know. A lot of you figure one vote one way or the other doesn't matter, or that you'd be voting for the lesser of two evils or that you'd be voting AGAINST somebody instead of for somebody.

BULL! VOTE. No, the whole world isn't going to turn on its head to agree with you, but you'll at least have your say. And that's what the system is about: Having your say, not necessarily your WAY.

And if you can't find something you LIKE about one of the candidates, then either you're simply not trying, or you're a hardened, self-centered mook who wants everything your own way all the time... Tough. Think of as taking a step TOWARD what you want. If you vote, you've got no place complaining. And I'll bet you a shiny new state quarter that there's going to be plenty to complain about for the next four years.

And if you truly think that your vote won't count, think about the 2000 election. Had either Gore or Bush realized how incredibly important Florida was going to be, the whole fiasco could have been avoided. But it was only the day before the election that they realized it was going to be a horse race and flooded the state with appearances and commercials.

Think one vote won't count? Take a look a this video from the future that a friend sent me: http://tinyurl.com/JoesFault

Yeah, I guess in that timeline, I didn't get out and vote. I WON'T make that mistake in THIS timeline. You shouldn't either. I don't care who you vote for, but make your voice heard.

And, as I said last week, those of you reading this outside the United States, wondering what this might have to do with you, ask yourself if you would have been willing to count on America... oh, 10 years ago. Now, ask yourself if you're willing to count on America today. I'd be willing to bet that your answers for then and now don't match.

I'm not going to go into my 'platform'... what I want to see in the next four years... but one thing is certain; nothing ever changed for the better because people did nothing.

Now, watch the video at the link I listed above, have a good chuckle, and think about how YOU are going to help take that one single step toward where you want to be.

When you're done we'll take a look at the UseNet stuff. We'll wait for you, I promise. [Grin]

Okay, ready? Let's take a look at the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

GGnkua posts:

"We are more than proud to announce the release of Ultimate Loading System (or ULS) version 3!

What is this you ask? Simply put, it’s a set of routines that let any piece of code run in any part of the system’s memory. Not impressive? What about if that piece of code wants to load or save something? What if that code trashes system memory and/or hard disk driver (typically loaded at low memory)?

While this is a generic description, it is meant mostly for making games/demos work from hard drive! This is not an automated process by any means, but it helps a lot in making that possible.

v3 adds Falcon/TT compatibility, picture dumping to disk (.pi1 format), state save/load (if you used it in MAME then you’ll be familiar with this!) and more!

Plus! It’s open sourced, which means all people can benefit from it!

Head over to http://dbug-automation.co.uk/, we already released the first title using that system, Formula One Grand Prix by Geoff Crammond, fully HD/Falcon/TT/etc patched!"

Mark Bedingfield tells G:

"Mate you guys rock, I wish I had more time to sit and enjoy."

Guillaume Tello asks G:

"You you say "fully HD/Falcon/TT/etc patched", does it still run on a STE with a Hard drive, or is it now reserved to Falcon and TT?"

Ggnkua replies to Guillaume:

"I mean it should run on any atari with a hard disk driver. If it doesn’t, we’d appreciate feedback on our forum!"

Nate McCoy asks about using Atari pointing devices:

"Can I use an atari joystick for mouse functionality in GEM OS? Is this possible? I haven’t tried it yet.

I do not have an atari mouse but have an atari joystick.

Just asking out of curiosity, I cannot find much information about this."

Ausl8 tells Nate:

"It is possible top use the joystick as a mouse and I used a small software utility which achieved it but that was a long time ago! I think it was called mouse stick and I probably got it from one of the ST magazines cover disks?

To use the keyboard to move the mouse pointer hold down the alternate key and use the arrow keys and the insert key acts as the left mouse button."

AtariNut asks about word processing:

"What’s a very good word processor for our Ataris? Not looking for something with a tons of bells and whistles."

Fidel-Sebastian Hunrichse-Lara tells AtariNut:

"Look at this: http://www.jaapan.de/en/uptodate.php?page=edit "

Mike Freeman adds:

"I’ve used Papyrus, Tempus Word, and AtariWorks. Papyrus seemed to work best for my purposes (MS Word compatibility and Web publishing). Tempus Word was good, but lacked some features I needed in some areas and had too many features in others, and the UI was hard to look at (small, jumbled together black and white icons bug out my eyes). AtariWorks was decent, but very basic. If you’re not looking for "bells and whistles", then it might work best for you. It all depends on what you’re looking for. If you’re more into DTP, PageStream was good."

’Mudge’ adds:

" ’That’s Write’ from Compo in the UK was superb and I wish Pagestream was still around it was great for it’s day and they were going to port it to the Mac - dunno what happened with that."

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Atari To Release New Riddick
                                   Halloween Scare, Try Games!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 Set to Deliver Collector’s Edition

THQ Inc. and JAKKS Pacific, Inc. Monday announced details of the WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 collector’s edition. Exclusively for the PlayStation computer entertainment system, the collector’s edition is now available for pre-order at select retailers worldwide. /WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 /is slated for release on the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft, the PlayStation 3, PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, PSP (PlayStation Portable) system, Wii video game console, Nintendo DS and mobile devices on November 9, 2008.

The WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 collector’s edition for the PlayStation 3 system features a copy of the game and a disc with exclusive Blu-ray content. Included on the disc is a behind-the-scenes documentary on the making of the videogame, as well as more than two hours of WWE footage from a variety of popular SmackDown vs. Raw cross-brand matches from 2008. The content is delivered in a unique steel cage package for North America, while fans in Europe and Asia Pacific regions will see their items encased within a miniature ring.

"The WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 collector’s edition for the PlayStation 3 system is a tremendous opportunity for us to collaborate with our partners to produce a unique offering for our fans," said Bob Aniello, senior vice president, worldwide marketing, THQ. "In addition to the great WWE video features, the videogame documentary will allow fans to see all of the work that goes into making their favorite fighting videogame franchise."

"The WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 collector;s edition is a must-have for the WWE aficionado," said Nelo Lucich, senior vice president of interactive, JAKKS Pacific. "With innovative content and packaging that looks great on collectors’ shelves, and a host of Blu-ray content including a behind-the-scenes, this collection is certain to be enjoyed by WWE fans for years to come."

Atari To Release New ’Riddick’ Game

The video-game publisher Atari said it plans to release "The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena" next year.

In conjunction with Universal Pictures Digital Platforms Group, Tigon Studios and developer Starbreeze Studios, Atari said it "is bringing the franchise to the new generation of consoles for the first time packed with thrilling new adventures."

The title is scheduled for launch on the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft, Playstation 3 computer entertainment system and Windows PC in spring 2009.

Previously announced as a remake of the hit title "The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay" with added content, Atari Thursday revealed "Dark Athena" contains a brand new full-length campaign.

"It’s very exciting to have ’Assault on Dark Athena’ as part of Atari’s 2009 publishing line-up," Phil Harrison, president of Infogrames

Entertainment, the parent company of Atari, said in a statement. "The first game in the series was a landmark in action gaming and the outstanding team at Starbreeze are creating a feature-packed follow-up which will delight fans and new players alike."

"We’re thrilled about this remake and expansion of ’Escape from Butcher Bay,’" added Ian Stevens, head of game production for Tigon Studios. "’Assault on Dark Athena’ tells a new story in ’The Chronicles of Riddick,’ while at the same time sharing our original vision with a larger audience."

Looking for a Halloween Scare? Try A Videogame

Looking for more than ghosts and ghouls to liven up Halloween? The latest videogames are offering plenty of scary options and new terror is waiting just around the corner.

Whether it is aliens, zombies or other monsters, new videogames aim to terrify players and keep them on edge like the best horror flick or psychological thriller.

Electronic Arts has launched a new space horror story with "Dead Space" on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC. Set aboard an abandoned mining spaceship, the USG Ishimura, gamers must use an assortment of weapons to destroy the horrific alien Necromorphs that have killed the crew.

"We have to constantly come up with new ways to scare the player and keep them guessing," said Glen Schofield, executive producer of "Dead Space" at Electronic Arts.

"It takes thousands of iterations and trial and error, but the rewards of seeing gamers totally freak out because of what we’ve put in the game are totally worth it."

Early next month the latest PC and Xbox 360 game from Valve Software, "Left 4 Dead," will offer four players an interactive terror ride through a town overrun by monsters.

"Your mission is to escape the city and the only way to get out alive is to work with your three teammates," said Gabe Newell, co-founder and managing director of Valve Software.

"The game adjusts to how the team is playing and the cinematic effects and story line dynamically change based on how well the players are working together."

Zombies have been cannon fodder for games since the very first "Resident Evil" on PlayStation. Capcom is bringing the latest game in the best-selling franchise out next March. Set in Africa, players explore the roots of the virus that has wreaked havoc in the previous games.

"’Resident Evil’s’ rich story is reminiscent of many of the modern-day psychological thrillers, while integrating elements of the slasher sub-genre, as well as elements of the supernatural and a rich helping of action." said Mike Webster, director of marketing.

Atari Inc is bringing the latest installment of one of the original

horror franchises, "Alone in the Dark: Inferno," to PS3 this month. Set in New York City's Central Park, developer Eden Games immerses the gamer in the tale of horror.

"There are no menu screens or inventories because once we have the player's full attention it's much easier to manipulate their emotions," said Nour Polloni, producer of the game.

When it comes to pure psychological horror, few game experiences compare to Konami's "Silent Hill" franchise. The game goes beyond frightening creatures to get inside the head of the player.

"Whenever they're feeling particularly on edge or at ease, we toss in a fright to keep them on edge, or betray their assumed safety," said Tomm Hulett, producer of "Silent Hill: Homecoming."

Nintendo's Wii takes a more campy approach to terror. Sega's "House of the Dead 2 & 3 Returns" and "House of the Dead Overkill" offer zombies and assorted nasties as target practice. Capcom takes advantage of Wii's motion-sensor controllers with "Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop", which puts the player inside a mall overrun by undead.

"With horror games, we give those fans more control of the situation," said Colin Ferris, product manager at Capcom. "It's one thing to watch an actor walk into the lair of a horrible creature, but it's a much more enhanced experience when you are that character and have no other choice but to proceed.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Launches Windows Azure

Microsoft on Monday announced a version of Windows that runs over the Internet from inside Microsoft's own data centers.

Dubbed Windows Azure, it's less a replacement for the operating system that runs on one's own PC than it is an alternative for developers to write programs that live inside Microsoft's data centers as opposed to on a business's own servers.

"It's a transformation of our software and a transformation of our strategy," said Ray Ozzie, a computing industry pioneer who now serves as Microsoft's Chief Software Architect.

Microsoft first outlined a shift to "Live Services" at an event in San Francisco in 2005. The company has released a few things piecemeal, such as Live Mesh, but Monday's announcement marked the first real discussion of how Microsoft's disparate Internet strategies fit together.

The announcements come at the start of Microsoft's Professional Developer Conference here. On Tuesday, Microsoft plans to go into more detail on Windows 7, the successor to Windows Vista, due out by next January.

With the launch of Azure, Microsoft will find itself in competition with other providers of Internet storage and computing services including Amazon, Salesforce.com and Rackspace.

Microsoft said that it is making Windows Azure in preview form to developers, with a limited subset of the features that Microsoft plans to have in the product before its final release.

Microsoft itself plans to offer businesses the option of running over the Internet the kinds of software that has traditionally run on a company's own servers. Microsoft already sells its Exchange corporate e-mail software in this way, but that is just the beginning, said Microsoft vice president Dave Thompson.

"All our enterprise software will be delivered as an online service as an option," Thompson said.

Next Version of Office Heads to the Browser

After years of questioning the value of Net-based productivity applications, Microsoft confirmed Tuesday that it will offer new versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint that can run from within a standard Web browser.

As first reported by CNET News last week, Microsoft will use its Professional Developer Conference here to show off browser-based versions of its Office programs.

In an interview, Microsoft Business Division President Stephen Elop said that the browser-based editing capabilities are being developed in conjunction with the next version of Office, known as Office 14. Microsoft won't say when that version will arrive, but Elop said that a technology preview of the browser-based products will come later this year and that a beta version will be released in 2009.

Microsoft will offer browser-based Word, Excel, and PowerPoint in two ways. For consumers, they will be offered via Microsoft's Office Live Web site, while businesses will be able to offer browser-based Office capabilities through Microsoft's SharePoint Server product.

The company has been pushed into this arena by Google, which has been offering its free Google Apps programs for some time. In competing with Google, Microsoft is touting the ability to use Microsoft's familiar user interface, as well as the fact that all of the document's characteristics are preserved.

"If you go into some competitive products right now and take a Word document in and then spit it out afterword, it's unrecognizable," Elop said. "You lose a lot of fidelity.

Elop said that not all of the editing capabilities of the desktop products are in the browser versions. "The editing we are characterizing

as lightweight editing," he said.

Although Google Apps has seen most of its popularity among consumers, it has started to attract attention from corporate customers. Google Apps got a strong look from Procter & Gamble, which only decided to stick with Office after a strong push from Microsoft. Part of that pitch, Elop said, included Microsoft offering details on its plans for the Web-based versions of the Office programs.

"This was part of the conversation, absolutely," Elop said. "We have been sharing with customers under varying circumstances to a greater or lesser extent."

Although he didn't name names, Elop said Microsoft has found itself in a competitive situation with Google in other business accounts as well.

HP Launches $400 Mini-Notebook As It Plays Catch-up

Hewlett-Packard Co on Wednesday will unveil a new mini-notebook in a move to gain ground in the fastest-growing PC category, which until now has been dominated by its smaller rivals.

Netbooks - ultraportable, inexpensive laptops designed for Web browsing and light tasks - have taken the PC market by storm this year, with smaller computer firms such as Acer Inc and Asustek Computer Inc leading the charge.

HP's sleek new Mini 1000, costing about $400, is significantly different from the company's first netbook release, launched last spring. It uses Intel Corp's Atom processor, and is also substantially less expensive, signaling that the price war in netbooks that some analysts have been predicting may have begun.

Although still a fraction of the overall PC market, netbooks' popularity could lead to changes in the pecking order of PC makers and cut into margins and profitability as average selling prices come down.

In the third quarter, Acer gained ground on HP and Dell Inc, with a big assist from mini-notebooks.

According to industry tracker IDC, Acer's total shipments leaped more than 50 percent, and the company's share of the overall PC market climbed more than 3 percentage points to 12.5 percent.

HP, although still the top-selling PC maker, saw its overall market share dip slightly to 18.8 percent, and was outsold in Europe by Acer.

Analysts said the company was impacted by its delayed entry into the mini-notebook market.

Bob O'Donnell, vice president at IDC, estimates 10.8 million netbooks will ship in 2008, out of the more than 300 million overall PC shipments forecast for the year. He expects netbook shipments to jump to 20.8 million in 2009.

Carlos Montalvo, vice president of marketing in HP's managed home business, said the Mini 1000 is a superior product to the "second- and

third-tier" offerings from competitors, which he said have been "over-optimized" for size and price, and lack HP’s consistency and quality.

Without releasing specific numbers, Montalvo said HP’s first netbook, which was targeted at the education market, was "phenomenally successful." However, he said the Mini 1000 is aiming for a broader audience.

The new netbook will start at $399 for a version running Microsoft Corp’s Windows XP, jumping to $549 for a fully loaded model. The company’s first netbook, the 2133, starts at $599 and tops out at $749, features a Via chip and runs Windows Vista.

HP will also offer a Mini 1000 that runs Linux for $379, as well as a special edition designed by fashion designer Vivienne Tam for $699.

The netbooks will all feature a keyboard that is 92 percent the size of a standard keyboard, and will weigh less than three pounds.

Although Montalvo views HP’s netbooks as complementary products, which a consumer would own in addition to their desktop or full-sized laptop, analysts don’t necessarily see it the same way.

Jayson Noland, an analyst with Robert Baird, said last week that netbooks’ place in the PC universe is still undefined.

"I don’t think any of us knows yet whether it’s a substitute product or a complementary one," said Noland. "In some markets in a mature economy like the U.S. or Western Europe it could be complementary, and in an emerging market it could be substitute."

Also uncertain is netbooks’ impact on the balance sheet. IDC’s O’Donnell fully expects to see a price war in netbooks, as companies try to boost sales to make up for the low price points.

"If you’re down to $300, then your profit margin goes away, so you have to make it up in volume. Their goal is all about high volume, low margin, and I think that’s going to be a challenge."

Noland said both HP and Dell have been a little late to catch on to the appeal of netbooks, but he expects them to regroup without much trouble. Dell introduced its first netbook in September.

However, Apple has been openly dismissive of the product.

Apple Inc Chief Executive Steve Jobs, on a conference call after the company’s earnings, said the iPhone does many of the things that netbooks do, and said there were markets that the company was just not interested in.

"There are some customers which we choose not to serve. We don’t know how to make a $500 computer that’s not a piece of junk."

Google May Scrap Yahoo Deal

Google Inc may decide to scrap its proposed partnership with Yahoo Inc.

rather than accept government-imposed antitrust restrictions on it, according to two sources familiar with the companies' discussions.

"Are they more serious about walking away? Yes. Have they decided? I'm not sure," one source told Reuters on Friday.

"Yahoo wants the deal, and they're willing to have Google sign anything at the Justice Department to have them do it," said the source.

A second source said that Google and Yahoo, Nos. 1 and 2 in the Internet search market, could announce as early as Friday that the deal had fallen apart.

Google and Yahoo representatives could not be immediately reached for comment.

Google and Yahoo delayed implementing the partnership announced in June to allow the U.S. Justice Department to scrutinize it for antitrust issues. Between them, Google and Yahoo had more than 80 percent of the web search market in August, according to comScore Inc.

The deal, which would allow Google to sell advertising for some of Yahoo's online advertising space, has drawn fierce criticism from advertisers, who fear higher prices.

Part of the impetus of Google's walking away could be Yahoo's talks with Time Warner Inc about buying the content and advertising operations of its AOL unit. Google initially struck the deal with Yahoo as a way to fend off Microsoft Corp's unsolicited bid.

Yahoo and AOL are conducting due diligence to see what a combined company would look like, another source previously told Reuters.

By collecting the revenue from placing Google ads along its search results, Yahoo's cash flow could grow by $250 million to $450 million in the first year of the deal, the companies had said in June.

The deal has since been mired in the regulatory process. In September, the Justice Department hired Sandy Litvack, its former antitrust chief and Walt Disney Co's former vice chairman, to consult on its probe of the search deal.

Banking Security on a USB Stick?

IBM was set to unveil on Wednesday a prototype USB device designed to protect people doing online banking from having their data stolen or compromised.

The device, which looks like a memory stick with an integrated display, creates a secure channel to a bank's online transaction server. The connection bypasses the user's PC, which could be infected with viruses and other malware that make sending financial information over the Internet unsafe.

The user can log on and validate transactions using the device's display and a smart card can be inserted into the device, providing an added layer of security to protect transmissions from man-in-the-middle

interceptions, IBM said.

The device, called a Zone Trusted Information Channel, runs the Transport Layer Security/Secure Sockets Layer (TLS/SSL) protocol and includes a TLS engine and a networking proxy for running on a PC.

Developed at IBM's Zurich Research Lab, pilot devices are ready for bank trials. They do not require changes in the bank server software or the client software and they run on all major client operating systems.

Notebook Sales Surpass PCs for First Time in US

Quarterly sales of notebook computers have topped those of desktop computers for the first time ever in the United States, market intelligence firm IDC reported on Wednesday.

IDC said notebook sales made up 55.2 percent of computer sales in the July to September quarter, 18 percent growth over the same period last year and the first time they have surpassed 50 percent.

It said a record 9.5 million notebooks were shipped during the quarter.

"These figures were reached amid a relatively active back-to-school season and the burgeoning financial crisis, which captured headlines but did not immediately affect the PC market's performance," the IDC said.

"The consumer market continued to be the top driving factor in the notebook offensive but the commercial sector played a critical role too," IDC research manager David Daoud said.

"Prolonged economic tension could have an adverse effect on the PC space leading to reduced growth, but the good news is that virtually every buyer considers PCs as must-have products and not a secondary wish-list items," he added.

PC Makers Recall 100,000 Sony Laptop Battery Packs

Computer makers are recalling 100,000 laptop battery packs made by Sony Corp. after 40 reports of overheating, according to a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission notice Thursday.

The voluntary recall applies to certain Sony 2.15Ah lithium-ion cell batteries made in Japan and sold around the world in laptops made by Hewlett-Packard Co., Dell Inc. and Toshiba Corp.

Some incidents involved smoke or flames, according to Sony. Twenty-one of the reports claimed minor property damage, and small burns were reported in four cases.

Sony blamed two factors for the defects: adjustments on its manufacturing line from October 2004 to June 2005, which may have affected the quality of cells in certain production lots; and a possible flaw in the metal foil for electrodes.

The company said no reports have been filed for batteries made after 2006, and noted that the recalled units are a small fraction of the more than 260 million it has shipped over six years.

This also pales in comparison to the recall of nearly 10 million of a different model of Sony batteries in 2006 and 2007, which affected almost every major PC manufacturer, including Dell Inc. and Apple Inc.

In this batch of problematic laptops, the bulk of the 35,000 affected computers in the U.S. were sold by HP between December 2004 and June 2006, according to the safety commission, including HP Pavilion, HP Compaq and Compaq Presario models.

Some Dell Latitude and Inspiron models shipped between November 2004 and November 2005 are also covered by the recall, as well as some Toshiba Satellite and Tecra laptops sold from April 2005 to October 2005.

An additional 65,000 of the flawed batteries were sold outside the U.S. The PCs and separate batteries were sold directly by the computer manufacturers, electronics stores and online retailers worldwide, not by Sony.

Sony said its own Vaio laptops don’t use the battery in question. Last month, however, the company recalled 440,000 Vaio notebooks worldwide because of a wiring flaw that can cause overheating.

The safety commission said PC users should remove laptop batteries immediately and contact the manufacturer to request a replacement. Details, including laptop model numbers and contact information for Dell, HP and Toshiba, have been posted on the commission’s Web site.

Army Says Twitter Could Coordinate Terrorist Attacks

The U.S. Army has identified Twitter, a popular micro-blogging service, as a potential vehicle for terrorists to plot destructive schemes. Global Positioning System maps and voice o changing software were also listed in the draft report by the 304th Military Battalion.

The Federation of American Scientists has posted the report, which examines mobile and Web technologies and how they could be used by terrorists, on its Web site. The Army based its report on Open Source Intelligence.

According to the report, Twitter has become a social o activism tool for socialists, human o rights groups, communists, vegetarians, anarchists, religious communities, atheists, political enthusiasts, hacktivists and others to communicate with each other and send messages to broader audiences.

The report described scenarios in which terrorists could leverage "potential adversarial use of Twitter," including detonating explosives and planning ambushes.

o Scenario One o : Terrorist operative A uses Twitter with (or without) a mobile phone camera/video function to send and receive messages from the rest of his cell. Operative A also has a Google Maps o Twitter mashup of where he is under a code word for his cell that can be viewed from

members’ mobiles. The members receive near o real o time updates on how, where and how many troops are moving in order to conduct an ambush.

o Scenario Two o : Terrorist operative A has a mobile phone for Twitter messaging and taking images. Operative A also has a separate mobile phone that controls an explosive device or a suicide vest for remote detonation. Terrorist operative B has the detonator and a mobile to view A’s tweets and images. This may allow B to select the precise moment for remote detonation based on near o real o time movements and images sent by A.

o Scenario Three o : Operative A finds U.S. [soldier] Smith’s Twitter account. Operative A joins Smith’s tweets and begins to elicit information from Smith. This information is then used for a targeting package (targeting in this sense could be identity theft, hacking and/or physical). This scenario is not new and has already been discussed for other social o networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook.

"Twitter is already used by some members to post and/or support extremist ideologies and perspectives," the report said. "Extremist and terrorist use of Twitter could evolve over time to reflect tactics that are already evolving in use by hacktivists and activists for surveillance. This could theoretically be combined with targeting."

But is the concept of terrorists plotting another 9/11 using Twitter far o fetched? And could Twitter really serve as a useful tool by militant jihadists? Of course Twitter could be used by terrorists, but then they could use any communications technology to coordinate attacks, observed Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant at Sophos.

"If I were a terrorist, I think I would be wary of using Twitter because of the risk that it kept a record of what I communicated, who to, and when ... all information which would be harder to track if, say, I used disposable mobile phones instead," Cluley said.

Comcast Claims Email Problems are Over

Since early last month, a number of Comcast subscribers have been experiencing problems logging in to their Comcast.net e-mail address. The subscribers have attempted to contact the cable provider, some with more success than others.

One thread on Comcast’s forums, which dates back to September 10th, has since racked up a staggering 419 messages spread out over nine pages, the last of which dates back to around 1:00 PM this afternoon. Our own blogger Geoff Fox alerted us to this.

"This has been an intermittent problem in past weeks however for the last 5 days straight this has been occurring," wrote the first user on the thread, "I use Microsoft Outlook (not Express) for my e-mail. A small window keeps appearing which reads: Enter Network Password - Please type your user name and password."

"My husband is having the same problem and he has used Opera, Thunderbird, Evolution and Outlook Express," she continues. "The same popup appears no matter what program is used. This is driving us nuts. He has spent time with a techie on the phone who was satisfied that

everything was okay after sending and receiving test messages via Webmail."

We contacted Comcast spokesman Charlie Douglas abut the issue. "The vast majority of the customers that were affected should be able to access accounts now," he said. "I don't have too much detail, other than the fact that I know our engineers were made aware of the problem almost immediately. They're working on it - there may be a small number of customers that are experiencing problems."

E-tailers Push E-mail Discounts To Lure Shoppers

Online retailers, grappling with a sharp drop in consumer spending from even their most gung-ho Web enthusiasts, are becoming pushier with e-mails that pitch the latest deals.

With pleas like, "Last chance to save 20 percent," or "Hurry, final sale ends," retailers from pure online players to land-based stores with a Web presence are hoping to get consumers to open their wallets, quickly and in a cost-effective way.

AnnTaylor Stores Corp.'s recent e-mails promote knit tops as low as $9.99, while Saks Fifth Avenue's e-mail messages tout up to 60 percent off on new women's fashions. But such attempts to pump up sales threaten to drive away shoppers, who may already be starting to get bleary-eyed over the bombardment.

And if consumers are fed up with the e-mail blasts now, just wait until the holiday season gets under way in earnest, with merchants expecting to increase the pace as they do whatever they can to make their sales goals.

"I find them annoying," said Cory Porter, a Web shopping fan from Washington D.C. who says he now receives about seven per day, twice as many as about two months ago. He had signed up with about nine retailers including Barneys New York, Banana Republic and Safeway to receive e-mail promotions, but thought they would be customized to his needs.

"I am a 32-year-old guy who lives in an urban area with no kids," Porter said. "In other words, I don't need blouses, high heels, or kids' juice boxes." As a result, he's opted out with some stores, directing the rest to his spam account.

The frenetic pace of offers comes as Web shopping, which had held up better in the slowing economy than store-based retailing, has been starting to slow dramatically since the financial meltdown intensified in September.

Sucharita Mulpuru, an analyst at Forrester Research, expects online retailers to fare better than regular stores this holiday season because of the convenience, the breadth of selection and the perceived value. But "there is definitely a significant slowing down" in online shopping, she said, noting that the stock market tumble, weaker job market and tighter credit have spooked even the most enthusiastic Web shoppers.

Amazon.com, considered the bellwether of Web shopping, announced late Wednesday that it was slashing its full-year sales outlook, saying it

had slower growth rates near the end of the quarter and now expects annual revenue below analyst expectations.

Porter, who does public relations for government contractors, noted that he slashed his spending on clothing and gadgets to $200 this month amid "all the economic uncertainty." That compares with the $500 per month he had been spending. He said he typically does about half of his buying on the Web.

Kurt Peters, editor-in-chief of trade publication Internet Retailer, noted that stores can easily react to a sharp sales slowdown in a matter of hours by sending out e-mail blasts, which is faster and more cost-effective than redoing a mailer to consumers. Julie M. Katz, another Forrester analyst, estimates that it costs about $2 for every thousand e-mails sent. The Direct Marketers Association estimates that marketers reap $45.06 in return on investment for every dollar they spend on e-mail campaigns. That compares with $7.28 for catalogs and $15.55 for direct mail pieces.

Analysts say that during the last recession in 2001, stores didn’t have the vast data bank of consumer contacts they could mine as they do now.

Internet Retailer’s recent survey of 174 Web retailers, including those that operate stores, found that nearly half have increased the number of monthly e-mails they send compared to a year ago. Chad White, director of retail insights for the Email Experience Council, the e-mail marketing arm of the DMA, reports an 8 percent increase in the number of e-mails stores have sent for the week ended Oct. 17, compared to the same week a year earlier.

Overall, Forrester predicts that retailers and wholesalers will send 158 billion marketing e-mails this year; that’s expected to increase 63 percent to 258 billion in 2013. At the same time, consumers are becoming turned off with e-mail. Forrester said it is finding that online consumers were annoyed with e-mail volume and are beginning to turn to social networking sites, texting and other communication channels.

Michael Wagner, CEO of etoys.com, said e-mail campaigns drive about 12 percent of overall revenue but noted that he’s not sure if they will do more this holiday season than last year. "We are concerned about exhausting the customer," he said.

The big problem, according to Stephanie Miller, vice president of market development for consulting group Return Path Inc., is that less than 20 percent of retailers’ e-mails are customized even though stores have the capability of targeting their messages. She thinks it’s because marketers don’t get the resources they need. That will change, she said, because just stepping up the frequency is not going to work in this challenging environment.

Dan de Grandpre, founder of dealnews.com, a site that keeps track of store bargains, said that he’s noticed that stores are sending out more reminders and are blasting e-mails that offer discounts across many categories instead of just one item. The bulk of the e-mails are coming from apparel and furnishings chains, which have been hardest hit by the economic slowdown as shoppers cut back on non-essentials.

Forrester’s Katz expects that stores may pull back on e-mail campaigns after the holiday season; she added such programs still cost companies a "chunk of change" given the millions of e-mails they send out.

"Consumers just don’t have the dollars. The reality is going to sink in," she said.

Is Surfing The Internet Altering Your Brain?

The Internet is not just changing the way people live but altering the way our brains work with a neuroscientist arguing this is an evolutionary change which will put the tech-savvy at the top of the new social order.

Gary Small, a neuroscientist at UCLA in California who specializes in brain function, has found through studies that Internet searching and text messaging has made brains more adept at filtering information and making snap decisions.

But while technology can accelerate learning and boost creativity it can have drawbacks as it can create Internet addicts whose only friends are virtual and has sparked a dramatic rise in Attention Deficit Disorder diagnoses.

Small, however, argues that the people who will come out on top in the next generation will be those with a mixture of technological and social skills.

"We’re seeing an evolutionary change. The people in the next generation who are really going to have the edge are the ones who master the technological skills and also face-to-face skills," Small told Reuters in a telephone interview.

"They will know when the best response to an email or Instant Message is to talk rather than sit and continue to email."

In his newly released fourth book "iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind," Small looks at how technology has altered the way young minds develop, function and interpret information.

Small, the director of the Memory & Aging Research Center at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience & Human Behavior and the Center on Aging at UCLA, said the brain was very sensitive to the changes in the environment such as those brought by technology.

He said a study of 24 adults as they used the Web found that experienced Internet users showed double the activity in areas of the brain that control decision-making and complex reasoning as Internet beginners.

"The brain is very specialized in its circuitry and if you repeat mental tasks over and over it will strengthen certain neural circuits and ignore others," said Small.

"We are changing the environment. The average young person now spends nine hours a day exposing their brain to technology. Evolution is an advancement from moment to moment and what we are seeing is technology affecting our evolution."

Small said this multi-tasking could cause problems.

He said the tech-savvy generation, whom he calls "digital natives," are

always scanning for the next bit of new information which can create stress and even damage neural networks.

"There is also the big problem of neglecting human contact skills and losing the ability to read emotional expressions and body language," he said.

"But you can take steps to address this. It means taking time to cut back on technology, like having a family dinner, to find a balance. It is important to understand how technology is affecting our lives and our brains and take control of it."

US Tech Giants Join Move To Protect Freedom of Speech Online

Google, Microsoft and Yahoo on Tuesday unveiled a code of conduct aimed at defending online freedoms against attacks by oppressive regimes in China, Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere.

A "Global Network Initiative," bringing together Internet companies, human rights organizations, academics and investors, commits the technology firms to "protect the freedom of expression and privacy rights of their users."

The initiative, which follows criticism the firms were assisting censorship of the Internet in nations such as China, requires them to narrowly interpret government requests for information or censorship and to minimize cooperation.

Attacks on Internet freedom and privacy are on the rise worldwide and the GNI is a budding alliance of technology companies united in response to what are seen as unreasonable requests by governments, according to its founders.

"It’s a global phenomenon; it is not just China," said Robert Mahoney, director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

"In the Middle East and North Africa there is a lot of repression, particularly of journalists. We believe that by acting together we have a better way to change the behavior of governments."

While China is "perhaps the most sophisticated regime" when it comes to Internet snooping and censorship its tactics are spreading, according to Colin Maclay, acting director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

"We are seeing those practices adopted in other countries," Maclay said.

"This is a trend we need to combat and it is global in scale. As more people get online the problem is going to get worse, so we need to have a network solution to address these problems."

The initiative provides a "systematic approach" for participants to "work together in resisting efforts by governments that seek to enlist companies in acts of censorship and surveillance that violate international standards."

GNI firms promise to reveal attempts by governments to pressure them

into violating worldwide standards regarding online privacy or access to information.

"These principles are not going to be a silver bullet, but the most important point for me is to provide transparency," said Danny O'Brien of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Yahoo co-founder and chief executive Jerry Yang welcomed the new code of conduct.

"These principles provide a valuable roadmap for companies like Yahoo operating in markets where freedom of expression and privacy are unfairly restricted," he said.

Yahoo was thrust into the forefront of the online rights issue after the California company helped Chinese police identify cyber dissidents whose supposed crime was expressing their views online.

China exercises strict control over the Internet, blocking sites linked to Chinese dissidents, the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual movement, the Tibetan government-in-exile and those with information on the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

A number of US companies, including Microsoft, Cisco, Google and Yahoo, have been hauled before the US Congress in recent years and accused of complicity in building what has been called the "Great Firewall of China."

Google has been criticized for complying with Chinese government's demands to filter Internet searches to eliminate query results regarding topics such as democracy or Tiananmen Square.

Earlier this month, Skype, the online text message and voice service owned by auction giant eBay, acknowledged that its Chinese partner, TOM Online, had been archiving politically sensitive text messages.

Microsoft has come under fire for blocking the blog of a prominent Chinese media researcher who posted articles critical of a management purge at the Beijing News daily.

Internet firms contend they must comply with China's laws in order to operate there.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said the initiative was a "first step" but does not go far enough in protecting Internet freedoms in oppressive countries.

The France-based group pulled out of talks with GNI founders last month and opted not to endorse the principles, which it contends have "loopholes and weak language" that leave room for abuses.

"Under these principles, another Shi Tao case is still possible," RSF said, referring to the Chinese reporter jailed after information provided by Yahoo helped Chinese authorities link him to online writings.

Email, Web Surfing Most Popular Personal Uses for Work PC

It probably wouldn’t shock most bosses, but three out of four of their employees are using their work computers for email, shopping, surfing and other personal business, according to a survey released on Monday.

Seventy-four percent of office workers use their work computer for personal tasks, the survey of nearly 530 Information Technology (IT) managers and end users at companies in North America, Britain and Europe found.

Fifteen percent do not use their work computers for personal purposes while 11 percent of the respondents preferred not to answer the question.

The survey was conducted September 17-31 by NewDiligence, an independent market research firm, for Belmont, California-based FaceTime Communications, a provider of Internet security solutions.

The survey looked at publicly traded and privately held firms, non-profits, government organizations and educational institutions. The margin of error was not published.

The most frequent personal use of a work PC was to send email to friends and family, followed by looking at Web sites (84 percent), banking and personal finance (68 percent) and shopping on the Web (57 percent), the survey found.

Fifty-seven percent use their work computer to listen to music or look at pictures and video while 44 percent use it for Instant Messaging (IM) chat with friends and family.

Thirty-two percent connect with friends through social network sites from their work computer and 20 percent update their social network profiles with photos and videos while at work.

Eight percent use their work computer to update their personal blog or comment on other blogs.

But if employees are using their work computers for personal activities they’re also using their home computers for work, according to the study.

It found that 90 percent of employees own a PC and 85 percent use it for work reasons.

These include email (85 percent), loading documents brought home on a disc or flash drive (79 percent), or downloading documents from the corporate network (73 percent).

The survey also found that visits to social network sites while at work were not strictly personal.

Fifty-one percent of end users access social network or media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn or YouTube at least once a day and 79 percent do so for business reasons - professional networking, research or learning about colleagues.

NYC Residents: Use Your Mouse To Track Rats Online

The city wants to make sure rats have no place to hide, at least online.

A Rat Information Portal, complete with a searchable map of rat inspections and violations, debuted Thursday on the city's Web site.

Beyond providing advice on rousting the rodents, the site aims to encourage residents to act as rat watchdogs, using the map to track trouble spots and pressure property owners who are slow to address them.

"It's so they can better understand what's expected of the people in charge but also what they can do to help push it along," said Dan Kass, an assistant commissioner of the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

The rat portal, which also offers photos of rat droppings and tips on choosing an exterminator, is the city's latest move to turn up the heat on the rodents. In recent years, the city has dispatched inspectors with handheld computers to canvass neighborhoods for signs of the vermin, hired a renowned rodent expert and stepped up efforts to evict the pests from parks.

Rats have long been a part of life in the nation's largest city, but some high-profile infestations have put a spotlight on the scurrying vermin. Television footage of rats scampering around a Manhattan KFC/Taco Bell restaurant after closing time in February 2007 became an Internet sensation, leading parent company Yum Brands Inc. to close the location permanently and the city to ramp up restaurant inspections. Later last year, city officials acknowledged they were fighting a rat problem in the park surrounding City Hall.

Kass said the city is seeing encouraging results from its neighborhood-wide inspections, which began in the Bronx last winter. The idea is to check for infestations in an area, instead of react to complaints about individual properties.

Preliminary results show the approach is improving eradication efforts, Kass said.

Health officials aren't the only ones doing their part to combat rats, said a spokesman for the Rent Stabilization Association, which represents the owners of about 1 million city apartments.

"Owners, in general, are very conscientious about it," said the spokesman, Jack Freund. "It's in nobody's interest to have a rat infestation."

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